TIRUPATI

When Vishnu returned to Vaikuntha after his Krishna avatar, Brahma, the creator, began to worry about the earth. Without Vishnu, he was afraid, chaos would ensue. So he and his son Narada, the wandering sage, set in motion a plan to get Vishnu to return to the earth.

A talking anthill, an arrogant sage, an irate cowherd, and even the asura king Ravana, each have their parts to play in these stories that describe the founding of the Venkateshwara temple at Tirupati. Set amongst the lovely Tirumala hills, this temple to Lord Vishnu, is one of the most beautiful temples in the world. It is said that more than 50,000 people visit this shrine every day, to pray to Venkateshwara to wash away their sins.

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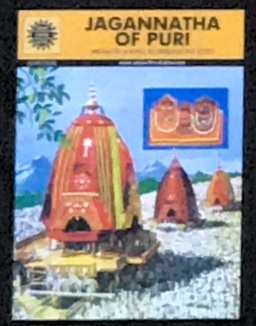
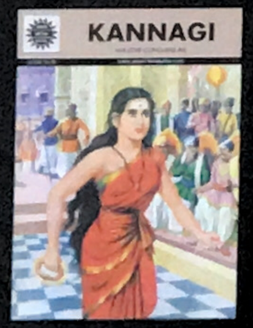


ALSO LOOK FOR:

BRAVEHEARTS



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AMAR CHITRA KATHA

TIRUPATI

THE LORD OF TIRUMALA

Vol 828 | ₹50

TIRUPATI

SET IN THE PEACEFUL BEAUTY OF THE SEVEN HILLS OF TIRUMALA, NEAR THE TOWN OF TIRUPATI IN ANDHRA PRADESH, IS THE TEMPLE OF LORD VENKATESHWARA BALAJI, OR VISHNU. HOW THE LORD CAME TO STAY HERE IS A STORY THAT MUST BE TOLD.

PARIMALA T.V
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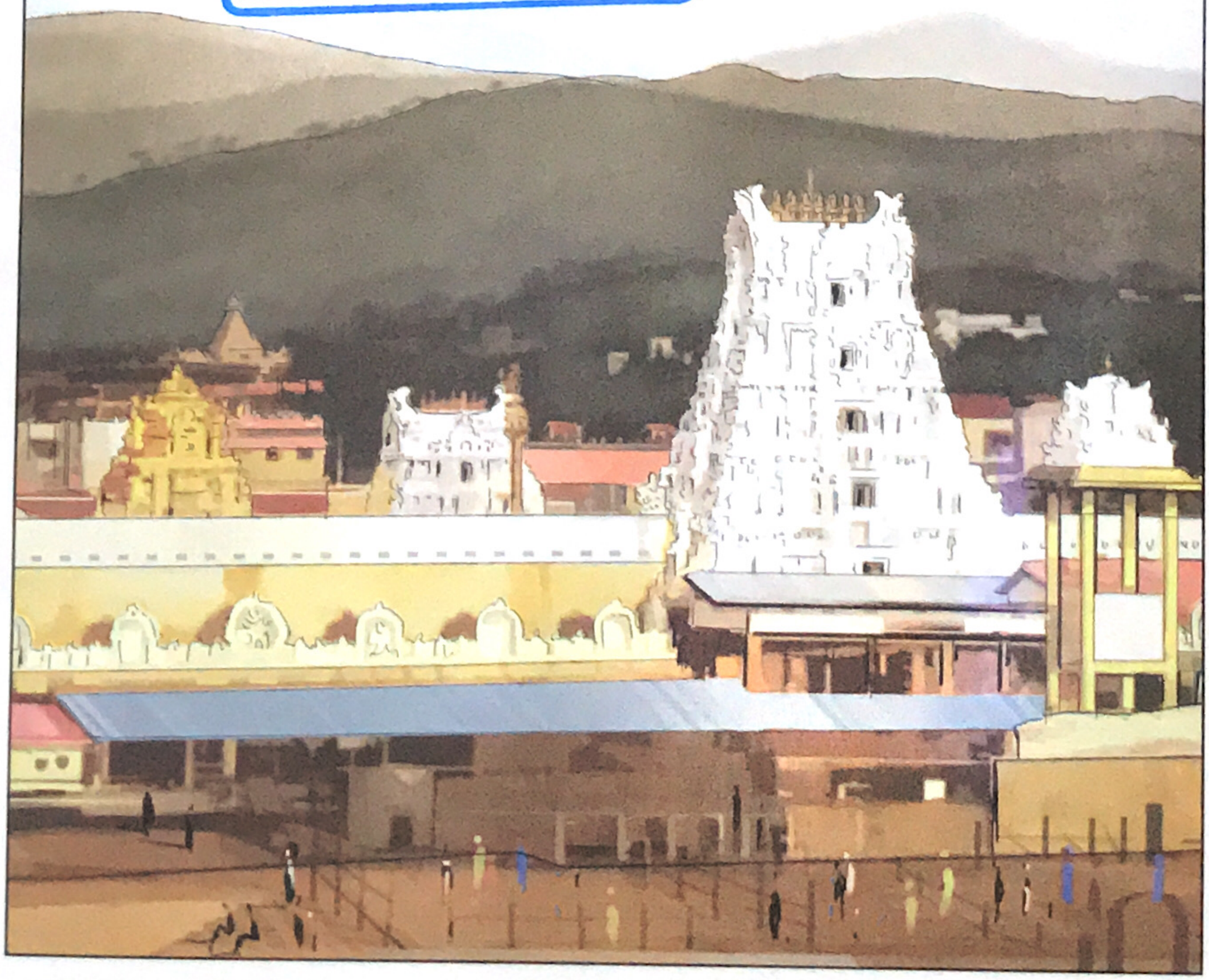
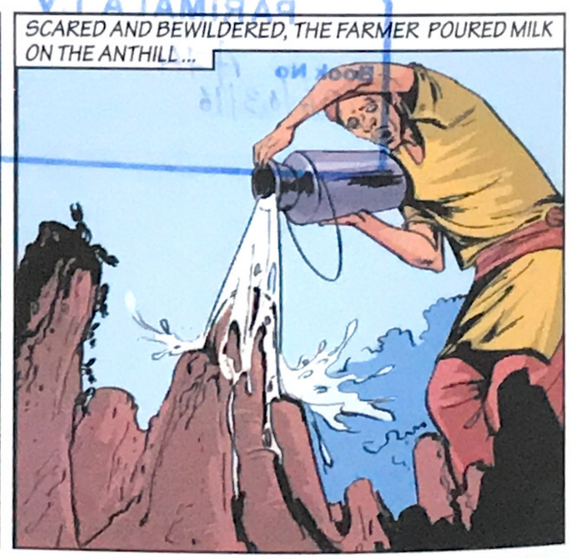
26/03/16

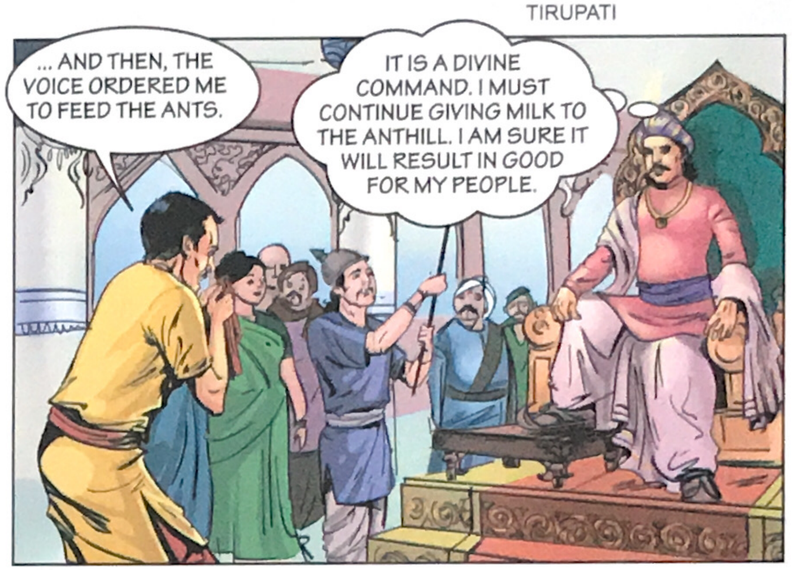


MANY MANY YEARS AGO -
WHAT AN ENORMOUS ANTHILL! ANYWAY, I'D BETTER HURRY IF I AM TO GET HOME BEFORE DUSK.

SUDDENLY -
HALT, PEASANT! FEED MY ANTS. THEY ARE HUNGRY.


SCARED AND BEWILDERED, THE FARMER POURED MILK ON THE ANTHILL ...

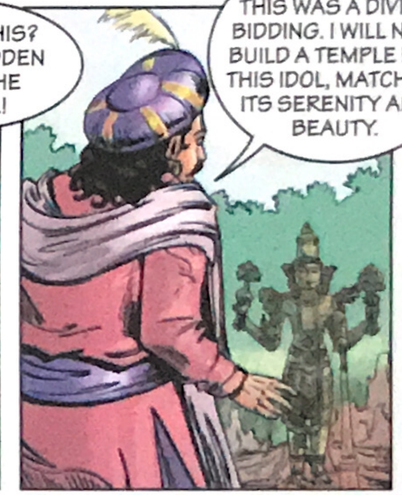
... AND THEN RAN TO TELL THE KING ABOUT IT.

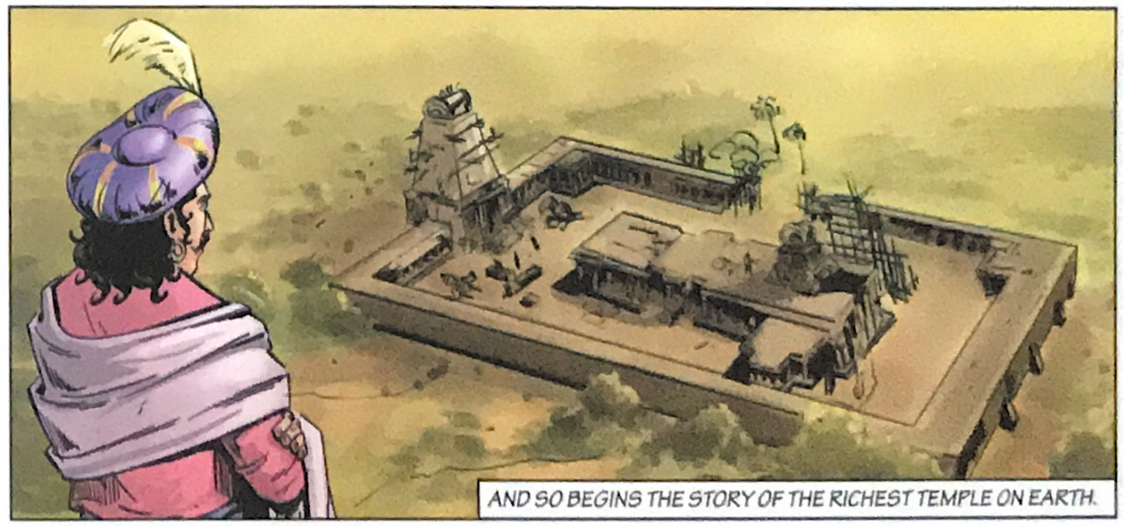

... AND THEN, THE VOICE ORDERED ME TO FEED THE ANTS.
IT IS A DIVINE COMMAND. I MUST CONTINUE GIVING MILK TO THE ANTHILL. I AM SURE IT WILL RESULT IN GOOD FOR MY PEOPLE.

SO, THE KING BEGAN OFFERING MILK TO THE ANTHILL EVERY MORNING.

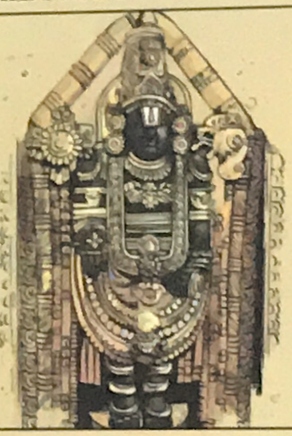
SOON -

WHAT IS THIS? AN IDOL HIDDEN WITHIN THE ANTHILL!


I WAS RIGHT. THIS WAS A DIVINE BIDDING. I WILL NOW BUILD A TEMPLE FOR THIS IDOL, MATCHING ITS SERENITY AND BEAUTY.


AND SO BEGINS THE STORY OF THE RICHEST TEMPLE ON EARTH.

THE STORY OF TIRUPATI



VISHNU AND LAKSHMI

LORD VISHNU HAD RETURNED TO VAIKUNTHA AFTER HIS KRISHNA AVATAR*. ON EARTH, MANY SAGES HAD COME TOGETHER TO PERFORM A YAGNA**, UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF SAGE KASHYAPA.

IN BRAHMALOKA –

LORD VISHNU IS BACK, BUT UNREST IS STILL RAMPANT ON EARTH.

NARAYANA! NARAYANA!

FATHER BRAHMA, YOU LOOK WORRIED.

JUST THE PERSON I NEEDED TO SEE.

O NARADA, LORD VISHNU HAS COMPLETED HIS KRISHNA AVATARA AND WON'T BE RETURNING TO EARTH SOON...

...I AM WORRIED THAT THIS WILL CAUSE CHAOS.

THEN WE MUST FIND A WAY TO BRING HIM BACK.

* VISHNU'S INCARNATION ON EARTH AS KRISHNA
** A SACRIFICIAL OFFERING

WILY NARADA APPROACHED THE SAGES AT THE YAGNA.

GREETINGS, O REVERED SAGES! HAVE YOU DECIDED WHO AMONGST SHIVA, BRAHMA AND VISHNU WILL RECEIVE THE FINAL OFFERING OF THE YAGNA?

IT SHOULD BE SHIVA.

NO, VISHNU.

BRAHMA. HE IS THE CREATOR OF THE THREE WORLDS.

THERE IS A SIMPLE WAY TO DECIDE WHO AMONGST THE THREE IS WORTHY OF YOUR OFFERING. WE JUST HAVE TO ASK THE WORTHY SAGE, BHRIGU, TO TELL US.

SAGE BHRIGU WAS A TEMPERAMENTAL AND ARROGANT SAGE WITH AN ALL-KNOWING THIRD EYE, EMBEDDED IN THE SOLE OF HIS FOOT.

O BHRIGU, WHO AMONG VISHNU, SHIVA AND BRAHMA IS WORTHY OF THE FINAL OFFERING OF THE YAGNA?

THEY HAVE FINALLY REALISED MY IMPORTANCE.

I WILL UNDERTAKE A JOURNEY TO ALL THREE TO DECIDE WHO IS WORTHY.

BHRIGU'S NEED TO FEEL IMPORTANT WILL ENSURE VISHNU'S CONTINUED PRESENCE ON EARTH. NARAYANA! NARAYANA!

SAGE BHRIGU STARTED MAKING PREPARATIONS FOR HIS LONG JOURNEY.

SOON -

FIRST I WILL VISIT BRAHMA, THEN SHIVA...

...AND LAST, I WILL GO TO VISHNU. SOON, EVEN THE GODS WILL ACKNOWLEDGE MY POWER.

SAGE BHRIGU ARRIVED IN BRAHMALOKA.

THERE IS BRAHMA. LET ME SEE HOW HE WELCOMES ME.

HOWEVER, BRAHMA WAS DEEP IN THOUGHT.

HE HAS NOT EVEN LOOKED IN MY DIRECTION. HE IS MAKING ME WAIT.

O BRAHMA, ACCEPT MY GREETINGS.

BRAHMA'S LACK OF RESPONSE ENRAGED BHRIGU.

O BRAHMA, YOU ARE ARROGANT AND DO NOT DESERVE TO BE WORSHIPPED...

...I CURSE YOU THAT FROM THIS DAY, YOU WILL NOT BE WORSHIPPED IN ANY FORM ON EARTH.

BHRIGU THEN APPROACHED KAILASHA, THE ABODE OF SHIVA.

I HOPE SHIVA WILL GIVE ME A BETTER WELCOME THAN BRAHMA.

BUT –

HALT, O SAGE, YOU CANNOT GO IN!

I HAVE TO MEET SHIVA.

WE HAVE BEEN TOLD NOT TO LET ANYBODY ENTER.

BHRIGU PUSHED HIS WAY IN, ANGRILY.

BHRIGU!

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

I TRAVELLED FROM THE EARTH TO GAUGE WHETHER YOU WERE WORTHY OF AN IMPORTANT SACRIFICIAL OFFERING...

... ONLY TO FIND THAT YOU HAVE NO TIME FOR THOSE WHO COME SEEKING YOU!

AS YOU ARE SO BUSY, I DON'T THINK IT WILL BE WORTHWHILE MAKING THAT OFFERING TO YOU.

I CURSE YOU. HENCEFORTH YOU WILL ONLY BE WORSHIPPED AS A LINGAM*, BY ALL ON EARTH.

AND SAGE BHRIGU LEFT KAILASHA.

* SHIVA IS USUALLY NOT WORSHIPPED IN HIS COMPLETE HUMAN FORM.

HE THEN PROCEEDED TO VAIKUNTHA, THE ABODE OF VISHNU, AND EXPECTING MORE DISRESPECT...

...STRUCK VISHNU ON HIS CHEST.

WITH HIS DIVINE INTUITION, VISHNU IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTOOD THE REASON FOR BHRIGU'S ANGER.

O GREAT SAGE, WELCOME! LET ME HAVE THE HONOUR OF SERVING YOU.

VISHNU PROCEEDED TO WASH BHRIGU'S FEET...

...AND AS HE DID SO, HE PINCHED THE EYE IN BHRIGU'S SOLE SHUT, THUS ENDING HIS ARROGANCE.

BHRIGU IMMEDIATELY REALISED HIS MISTAKE.

VENERABLE SAGE, IT WOULD BE AN HONOUR.

VISHNU, MY ARROGANCE BLINDED ME. YOU ARE THE WORTHIEST OF ALL. PLEASE ACCEPT THE SACRIFICIAL OFFERING MADE BY THE SAGES ON EARTH.

BUT WHEN BHRIGU LEFT -

LAKSHMI SEEMS UPSET. WHAT IS IT, I WONDER?

LAKSHMI WAS EXTREMELY DISTRESSED.

WHAT HAPPENED, MY DEAR? WHAT HAS AGITATED YOU SO?

SAGE BHRIGU KICKED YOU ON YOUR CHEST, ON THE VERY PLACE WHERE I RESIDE. HE HAS INSULTED ME...

...AND YOU DID NOT EVEN REPRIMAND HIM FOR HIS INSOLENCE. DOES IT NOT BOTHER YOU THAT BHRIGU SLIGHTED YOUR WIFE?

I CANNOT STAY HERE ANY LONGER.

LAKSHMI! DON'T LEAVE ME!

LAKSHMI DESCENDED TO EARTH AND BEGAN TO LIVE IN KARVIPUR*.

VISHNU WAS DESOLATE.

I HAVE TO BRING HER BACK.

SEARCHING FOR LAKSHMI, VISHNU CAME TO EARTH AND STEPPED INTO THE SESHACHALAM** HILLS. HERE HE MEDITATED IN AN ANTHILL, WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER.

MEANWHILE -

WE MUST HELP VISHNU. HE NEEDS SUSTENANCE. WE WILL DO IT WITH LAKSHMI'S HELP.

BRAHMA AND SHIVA TOOK THE FORM OF A CALF AND A COW. THEY WENT TO LAKSHMI WITH NARADA, WHO TOLD HER OF THEIR PLAN.

WE REQUEST YOU TO TAKE THE COW AND CALF TO THE CHOLA^ KING.

LAKSHMI AGREED AT ONCE.

O KING, PLEASE ACCEPT THIS GIFT FROM YOUR HUMBLE SUBJECT.

THE KING, IN TURN, PRESENTED THE COW AND CALF TO HIS QUEEN AND ASKED HER TO TAKE GOOD CARE OF THEM.

* PRESENT DAY KOLHAPUR IN MAHARASHTRA
** SEE PAGE 29

^ A SOUTH INDIAN DYNASTY

YOU WILL TAKE THE COW AND CALF TO GRAZE EVERY DAY.

YES, YOUR MAJESTY.

HOWEVER -

WHY IS THE COW YIELDING NO MILK? THE COWHERD IS CHEATING US! I MUST GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS.

THE QUEEN TOOK THE COWHERD TO TASK, BUT -

I AM INNOCENT. GIVE ME A CHANCE TO PROVE IT.

THE QUEEN RELENTED.

I WILL FOLLOW THE COW AND FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS TO THE MILK.

TO HIS SURPRISE -

THE COW IS GIVING ALL HER MILK TO THE ANTHILL! SO THIS IS WHERE THE MILK GOES EVERY DAY AND I GET BLAMED. WHY I WILL...!

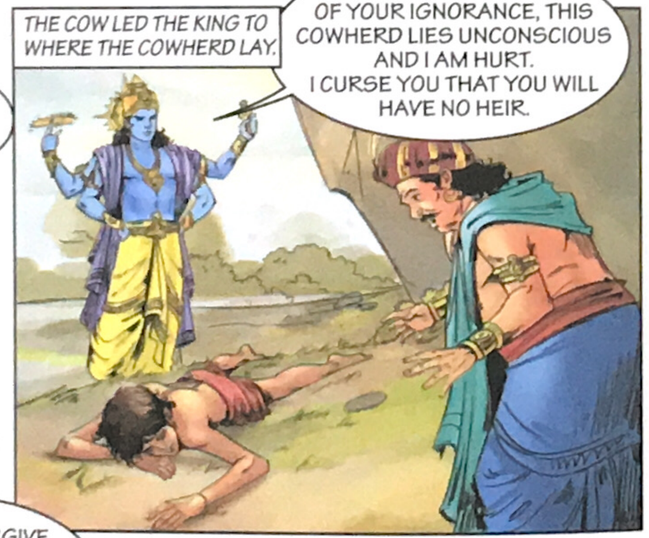
IN HIS ANGER AT THE ANIMAL, THE COWHERD HURLED HIS AXE AT THE COW...

...BUT TO HIS HORROR...

... IT HIT VISHNU, WHO STEPPED IN TO PROTECT THE COW.
THWAACK!!!

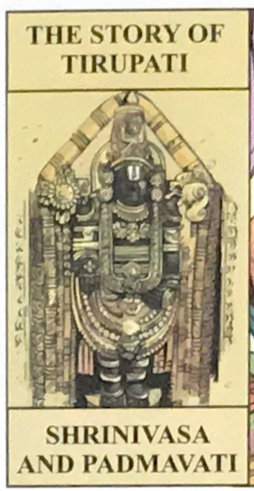
SHOCKED AT WHAT HE HAD DONE, THE COWHERD FELL TO THE GROUND, UNCONSCIOUS.

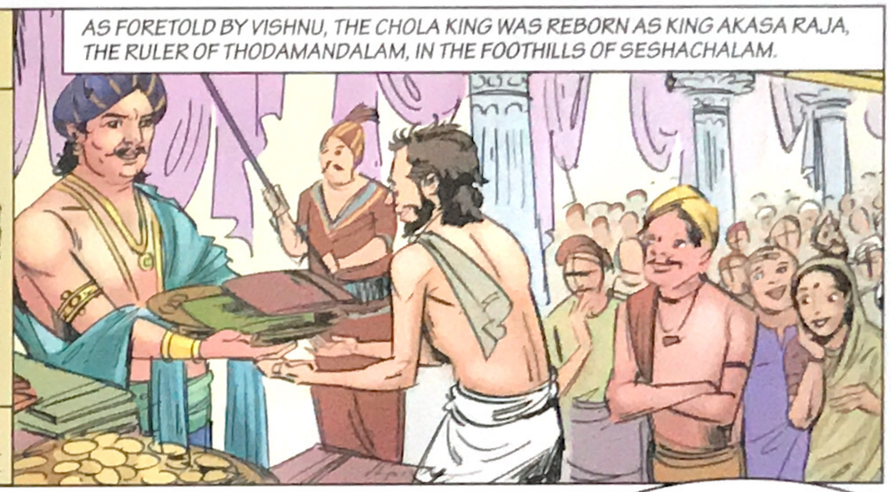
THE TERRIFIED COW RETURNED BELLOWING TO THE PALACE.
WHAT IS THIS? THE COW AND THE CALF ARE SO TERRIFIED. WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED?

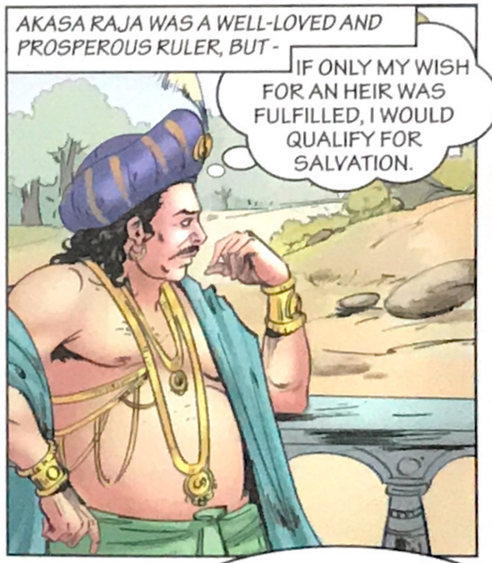

THE COW LED THE KING TO WHERE THE COWHERD LAY.
YOU FOOL! BECAUSE OF YOUR IGNORANCE, THIS COWHERD LIES UNCONSCIOUS AND I AM HURT. I CURSE YOU THAT YOU WILL HAVE NO HEIR.

MY LORD, FORGIVE ME, FOR I DID NOT KNOW. GIVE ME A CHANCE TO ATONE FOR MY SINS.

SEEING THE KING'S REGRET, VISHNU FORGAVE HIM.
IN YOUR NEXT BIRTH, YOU WILL BE BORN AS KING AKASA RAJA. YOU WILL THEN HAVE A DAUGHTER WHOM I SHALL MARRY.

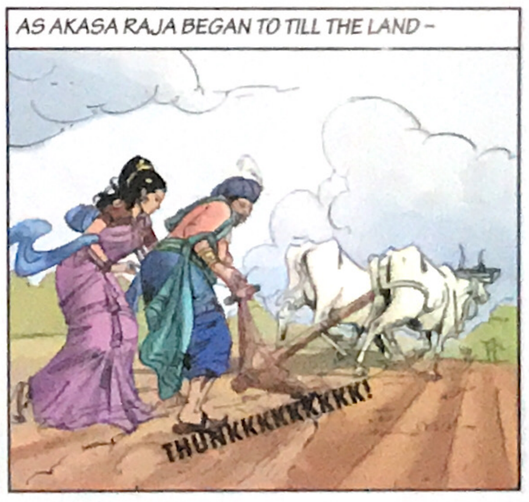

THE STORY OF TIRUPATI
SHRINIVASA AND PADMAVATI


AS FORETOLD BY VISHNU, THE CHOLA KING WAS REBORN AS KING AKASA RAJA, THE RULER OF THODAMANDALAM, IN THE FOOTHILLS OF SESHACHALAM.


AKASA RAJA WAS A WELL-LOVED AND PROSPEROUS RULER, BUT -
IF ONLY MY WISH FOR AN HEIR WAS FULFILLED, I WOULD QUALIFY FOR SALVATION.

THE KING WENT TO THE SAGES FOR ADVICE.
WE WILL NEED TO PERFORM A SPECIAL YAGNA. WE'LL MAKE THE PREPARATIONS IMMEDIATELY.

AND SO -
O KING, AS PART OF THE YAGNA, YOU AND YOUR QUEEN MUST TILL THIS FERTILE PIECE OF LAND.


AS AKASA RAJA BEGAN TO TILL THE LAND –
THUNKKKKKKKK!

A BOX! WHAT COULD BE IN IT?

A BABY GIRL!

OUR DAUGHTER!

AS SHE WAS FOUND RESTING ATOP A GOLDEN LOTUS, I WILL NAME HER PADMAVATI.

SUDDENLY -

LORD AGNI*!

O KING, TAKE GOOD CARE OF THIS CHILD. SHE IS THE REINCARNATION OF VEDAVATI AND IS DESTINED TO MARRY LORD VISHNU HIMSELF IN THIS BIRTH.

* THE GOD OF FIRE

AGNI NARRATED THE STORY OF VEDAVATI.

VEDAVATI WAS THE DAUGHTER OF SAGE KUSADHVAJA....

SHE IS SO SERENE AND PURE - MY REWARD FOR DEVOTING MY LIFE TO THE HOLY VEDAS. VEDAVATI – THE EMBODIMENT OF THE VEDAS THEMSELVES.

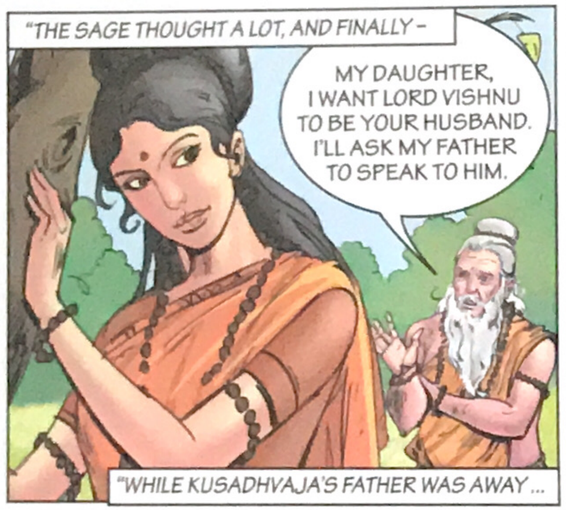
"AS SHE GREW UP, KUSADHVAJA TAUGHT VEDAVATI FROM THE HOLY BOOKS.

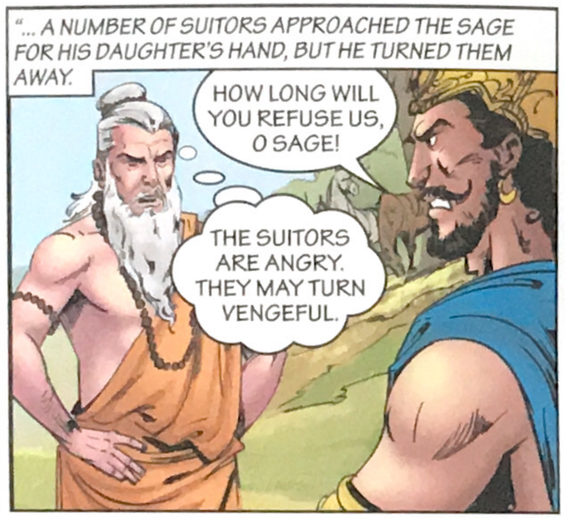
OM BHUR BHUVA SWAHA....

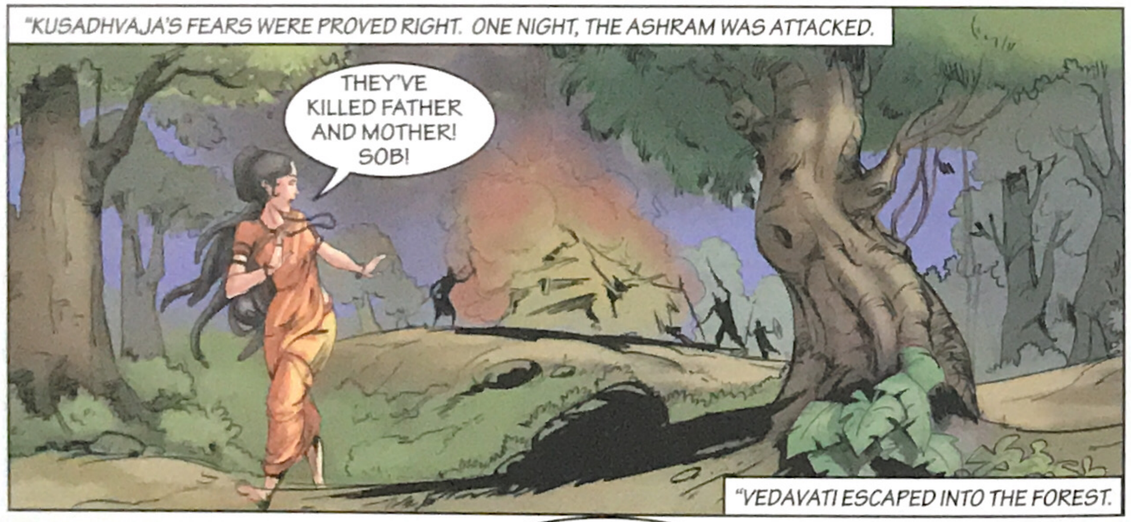
OM BHUR.....

"THE YEARS WENT BY -

IT IS TIME TO FIND A HUSBAND FOR MY DAUGHTER.


"THE SAGE THOUGHT A LOT, AND FINALLY –
MY DAUGHTER, I WANT LORD VISHNU TO BE YOUR HUSBAND. I'LL ASK MY FATHER TO SPEAK TO HIM.
"WHILE KUSADHVAJA'S FATHER WAS AWAY ...

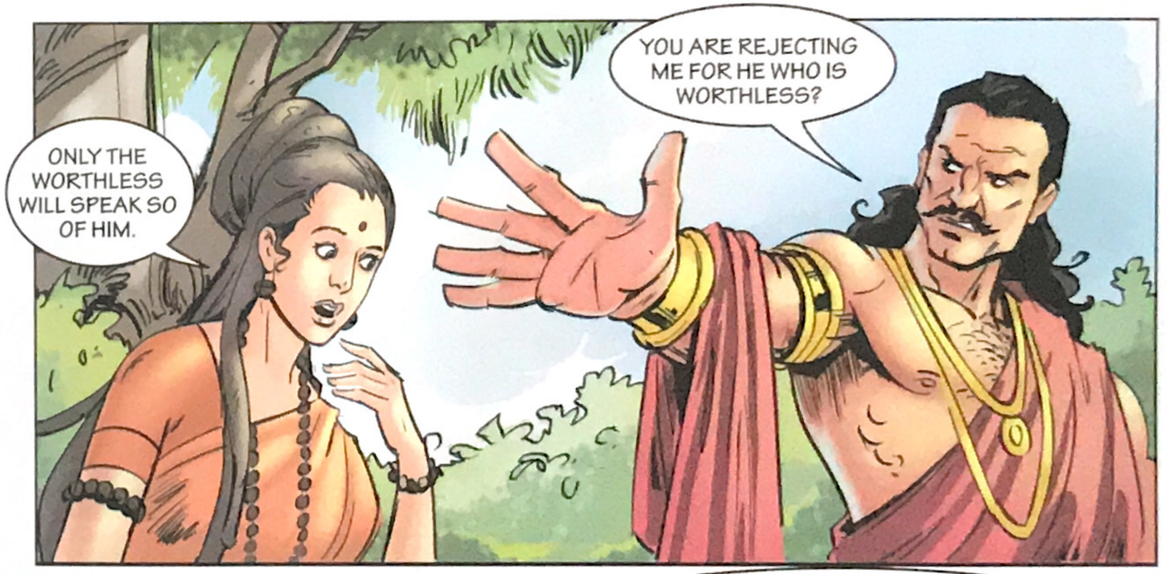

"... A NUMBER OF SUITORS APPROACHED THE SAGE FOR HIS DAUGHTER'S HAND, BUT HE TURNED THEM AWAY.
HOW LONG WILL YOU REFUSE US, O SAGE!
THE SUITORS ARE ANGRY. THEY MAY TURN VENGEFUL.


"KUSADHVAJA'S FEARS WERE PROVED RIGHT. ONE NIGHT, THE ASHRAM WAS ATTACKED.
THEY'VE KILLED FATHER AND MOTHER! SOB!
"VEDAVATI ESCAPED INTO THE FOREST.

I HAVE LOST EVERYTHING I HOLD DEAR. FROM TODAY I WILL MEDITATE ONLY ON VISHNU. HE WILL BE MY HUSBAND, JUST AS FATHER WISHED.

"NEWS OF VEDAVATI'S BEAUTY HAD REACHED THE EARS OF RAVANA, KING OF THE ASURAS.
I WILL ASK VEDAVATI TO BE MY WIFE. SHE CANNOT REFUSE ME.

"BUT -
I HAVE ACCEPTED LORD VISHNU AS MY HUSBAND. I WILL HAVE NO OTHER.


ONLY THE WORTHLESS WILL SPEAK SO OF HIM.
YOU ARE REJECTING ME FOR HE WHO IS WORTHLESS?

WHO IS VISHNU? WHAT HAS HE DONE? HOW DARE YOU COMPARE HIM TO ME? I WHO AM INVINCIBLE, WHOM NO DEVA OR ASURA CAN DEFEAT. YOU CANNOT REFUSE ME!

"RAVANA PURSUED VEDAVATI.

OH!

HOW DARE YOU TOUCH MY HAIR! I WILL SEEK THE PROTECTION OF LORD AGNI.

GIVE ME REFUGE, AGNI DEVA.

"WITH THE STRENGTH OF HER MEDITATION, VEDAVATI CALLED ME."

AGNI CONCLUDED HIS STORY -

SO FAR VEDAVATI HAS BEEN SAFE WITH ME BUT NOW, THE TIME HAS COME FOR HER DESTINY TO BE FULFILLED. I LEAVE HER IN YOUR CARE, O KING.

MEANWHILE, VISHNU HAD SETTLED DOWN IN VARAHAKSHETRA*, IN THE FORM OF A HERMIT, SHRINIVASA.

DURING HIS SECOND INCARNATION, VISHNU HAD TAKEN THE FORM OF VARAHA, A BOAR, TO RESCUE EARTH FROM THE CLUTCHES OF HIRANYAKSHA, A RAVAGING DEMON.

O LORD, BHOODEVI ** NEEDS YOUR PROTECTION. DO NOT LEAVE HER.

SO BE IT.

VARAHA TOOK A MORE TRANQUIL FORM AND MADE ARRANGEMENTS FOR HIS STAY IN VARAHAKSHETRA.

GARUDA, BRING KREEDACHALA^ FROM VAIKUNTHA AND PLACE IT HERE. THIS WILL BE MY HOME.

IT WAS HERE, AGAIN, THAT VISHNU STAYED AS SHRINIVASA WITH HIS FOSTER MOTHER, VAKULA DEVI.

* NEAR TIRUPATI. ALSO KNOWN AS ADI VARAHAKSHETRA

** THE EARTH

^ A JEWEL-ENCRUSTED PLAYFIELD

ONE DAY, SHRINIVASA WAS OUT HUNTING, WHEN -

HELP! HELP!

IT WAS A ROGUE ELEPHANT CHASING SOME WOMEN.

SHRINIVASA SUBDUED THE ELEPHANT AND CHASED IT AWAY.

SHE HAS SUCH A REGAL BEARING. I WONDER WHO SHE IS?

HE SAVED OUR LIVES. WHOEVER HE MAY BE, I VOW TO MARRY ONLY HIM.

HURRY, PRINCESS PADMAVATI, WE MUST LEAVE. YOUR FATHER WILL BE WORRIED.

PRINCESS PADMAVATI!

SHRINIVASA TOLD HIS MOTHER WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

....HER NAME IS PADMAVATI AND SHE IS THE DAUGHTER OF AKASA RAJA. MOTHER, YOU MUST GO TO THE KING AND ASK FOR HER HAND IN MARRIAGE TO ME. SHE HAS BEEN DESTINED TO MARRY ME.

AND SHRINIVASA REVEALED PADMAVATI'S STORY AND HIS TRUE IDENTITY TO VAKULA DEVI.

MY SON IS ADAMANT ABOUT MARRYING PADMAVATI. BUT WILL THE KING BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL HIM ABOUT SHRINIVASA'S TRUE IDENTITY?

HOWEVER, VAKULA DEVI AGREED TO GO TO AKASA RAJA WITH THE PROPOSAL.

I HOPE I CAN CONVINCE THE KING. IT WILL MAKE MY SON HAPPY.

MOTHER IS WORRIED THAT THE KING MAY NOT BELIEVE HER. I THINK SHE WILL NEED SOME HELP.

SHRINIVASA TOOK THE FORM OF A FORTUNE-TELLER AND SET OFF FOR THE PALACE.

HE REACHED THE CITY MUCH BEFORE VAKULA DEVI, TELLING FORTUNES ON HIS WAY.

GO WEST, AND YOU WILL MEET SUCCESS.

SOON, ONE OF THE PALACE MAIDS BROUGHT HIM TO THE QUEEN.

TELL ME WHAT IS IN STORE FOR MY DAUGHTER.

THE PRINCESS IS DESTINED TO MARRY LORD VISHNU HIMSELF. A PROPOSAL WILL SOON COME THAT YOU MUST NOT REFUSE.

AFTER A WHILE, VAKULA DEVI REACHED THE PALACE.

VAKULA DEVI EXPLAINED HER ERRAND TO THE KING.

....AND HENCE, I HAVE COME HERE, O KING, TO ASK FOR YOUR DAUGHTER'S HAND IN MARRIAGE TO MY SON, SHRINIVASA.

THE QUEEN QUICKLY INFORMED THE KING ABOUT THE ASTROLOGER'S PREDICTION.

...OUR DAUGHTER IS DESTINED TO MARRY LORD VISHNU. SOMETHING TELLS ME THAT THIS PROPOSAL WOULD PROVE FORTUNATE INDEED.

THE KING CONSULTED BRIHASPATI, HIS ADVISOR.

O KING, THE LORD HIMSELF HAS COME SEEKING YOUR DAUGHTER IN MARRIAGE. DO NOT HESITATE, ALL WILL BE WELL.

SOON PREPARATIONS FOR THE GRAND WEDDING BEGAN IN EARNEST.

MEANWHILE, SHRINIVASA WAS WORRIED .

I HAVE NO MONEY, NOTHING...HOW DO I BRING MY BRIDE TO A HOME BEFITTING A PRINCESS?

TO FIND A SOLUTION, SHRINIVASA APPROACHED KUBERA, THE LORD OF WEALTH.

O KUBERA, PLEASE LOAN ME THE MONEY I NEED, TO MARRY AND BRING MY WIFE HOME.

KUBERA LOANED SHRINIVASA THE MONEY.

WITH THIS WEALTH, SHRINIVASA CREATED A BEAUTIFUL HOME FOR PADMAVATI AND HIMSELF, WHICH WAS LIKE VAIKUNTHA ITSELF.

THE DAY OF THE WEDDING ARRIVED.

AND IN THE PRESENCE OF BRAHMA, SHIVA AND ALL THE GODS, SHRINIVASA MARRIED PADMAVATI, THEREBY FULFILLING VEDAVATI'S DESTINY AND HIS PROMISE.

AFTER THEIR MARRIAGE, SHRINIVASA AND PADMAVATI LIVED HAPPILY, SPENDING TIME IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY.

MEANWHILE IN KARVIPUR –

NARAYANA, NARAYANA! O MOTHER LAKSHMI, HAVE YOU HEARD THE GOOD NEWS? LORD VISHNU HAS MARRIED PRINCESS PADMAVATI. WHAT POMP, WHAT GAIETY....

SEETHING WITH RAGE, LAKSHMI RUSHED TO VARAHAKSHETRA.

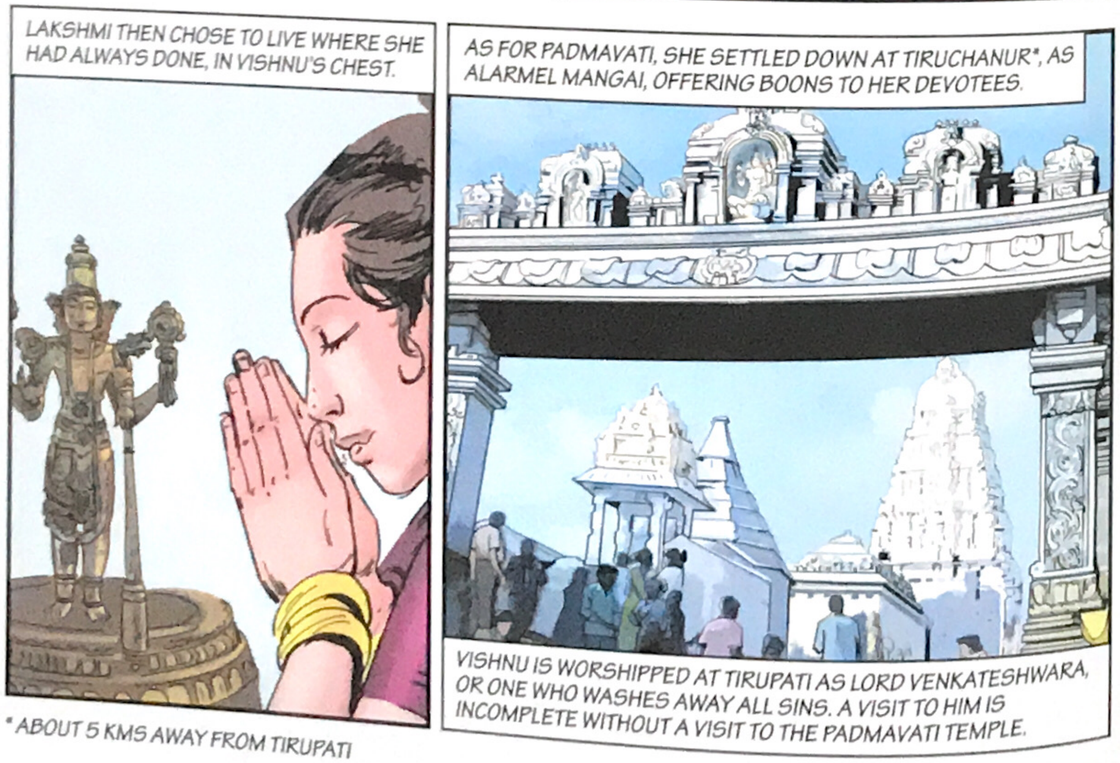
AT THE SIGHT OF LAKSHMI'S ANGER, VISHNU SIMPLY FROZE IN FRIGHT.

IN HIS FEAR, HE TURNED INTO STONE.

THEN BEGAN A GREAT FIGHT BETWEEN LAKSHMI AND PADMAVATI.

I HAVE RESIDED IN HIS HEART SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME, AND YOU, AN UPSTART, CLAIM HIM FROM ME!

HE WAS DESTINED TO BE MY LORD.



* ABOUT 5 KMS AWAY FROM TIRUPATI

SESHACHALAM

THE ORIGIN OF THE TIRUMALA HILLS LIES IN AN ANCIENT CONTEST OF POWER BETWEEN VAYU, THE GOD OF WIND AND ADISESHA, THE KING OF SERPENTS.

ONCE, VISHNU WANTED TO SPEND SOME TIME WITH HIS CONSORT, LAKSHMI AND ASKED ADISESHA TO ENSURE THAT THEY WERE NOT DISTURBED. THE DUTIFUL ADISESHA REFUSED TO LET EVEN VAYU ENTER VAIKUNTHA. INCENSED BY WHAT HE PERCEIVED AS A SLIGHT, VAYU THREATENED TO BLOW ADISESHA OFF MOUNT MERU. BUT THE SERPENT KING DID NOT BUDGE.

THE TERRIBLE CONTEST THAT FOLLOWED LASTED FOR MANY DAYS AND WREAKED UTTER HAVOC IN THE HEAVENS. FINALLY, A SHAKEN BRAHMA APPROACHED ADISESHA AND BEGGED HIM TO RELENT. THE SERPENT KING ACCEDED TO BRAHMA'S REQUEST AND WAS IMMEDIATELY BLOWN AWAY TO EARTH.

HOWEVER, IN RETURN FOR HIS GRACIOUSNESS, BRAHMA GRANTED ADISESHA A BOON - HE WOULD BE WITH HIS LORD FOREVER AND WORSHIPPED AS SUCH. ADISESHA WAS THUS TRANSFORMED INTO A MASSIVE RANGE OF HILLS, WITH HIS HOOD INTACT.

THE HILL RANGE IS WHAT WE KNOW TODAY AS SESHACHALAM – THE HOME OF LORD BALAJI OF TIRUPATI.

NEELA DEVI

WHY DO PEOPLE MAKE AN OFFERING OF THEIR HAIR AT TIRUPATI? THE ANSWER LIES IN THE STORY OF LORD VISHNU'S DEBT TO A KIND-HEARTED GANDHARVA PRINCESS, NEELA DEVI.

THE WOUND THAT THE COWHERD'S AXE HAD INFLICTED ON LORD VISHNU, DID NOT HEAL COMPLETELY AND THE HANDSOME GOD WAS LEFT WITH A PERCEPTIBLE BALD SPOT. WHILE HE BROODED OVER HIS REFLECTION IN THE WATER, A GANDHARVA PRINCESS NAMED NEELA DEVI WATCHED HIM WITH GREAT INTEREST FROM BEHIND A TREE.

MOVED BY HIS MISERY, SHE DECIDED TO HELP HIM. APPROACHING HIM, SHE SAID, "MY LORD, SUCH AN ATTRACTIVE FACE SHOULD BE WITHOUT A FLAW." SHE CUT OFF HER OWN LUSTROUS HAIR AND PRESSED IT ON VISHNU'S BALD SPOT.

OVERWHELMED BY HER SELFLESS ACT, VISHNU DECREED THAT WHOEVER CAME TO WORSHIP HIM WOULD SACRIFICE THEIR HAIR TO HER. EVEN NOW, THOUSANDS OF VISHNU'S DEVOTEES FLOCK TO TIRUPATI AND OFFER THIS HIGHLY UNUSUAL GIFT, TO CLEAR HIS DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO NEELA DEVI.

RANGADASA

RANGADASA WAS A STAUNCH DEVOTEE OF LORD VISHNU. HE WORSHIPPED THE LORD DAILY, STANDING IN FRONT OF A MAKESHIFT TEMPLE. THE TEMPLE HAD AN IDOL OF LORD BALAJI ENCLOSED BY ROUGH STONES, AT THE BASE OF A TAMARIND TREE.

ONE DAY, DISTRACTED BY A FEW GANDHARVAS, RANGADASA FORGOT HIS WORSHIP AND SAT IN FRONT OF THE TEMPLE, HIS PUJA TRAY AND OTHER THINGS IN DISARRAY. SUDDENLY, THE IDOL CRACKED OPEN AND AN ANGRY LORD VISHNU EMERGED FROM WITHIN. HE ADMONISHED HIS DEVOTEE FOR FAILING IN HIS WORSHIP.

RANGADASA FELL AT HIS FEET AND BEGGED FOR FORGIVENESS. VISHNU RELENTED AND BLESSED RANGADASA FOR HIS DEVOTION, SAYING THAT HE WOULD BE REBORN AS A GREAT RULER AND CONSTRUCT A BEAUTIFUL TEMPLE WITH A VIMANA AND HIGH SURROUNDING WALLS. THE TEMPLE, DEDICATED TO VISHNU, WOULD BRING ETERNAL GLORY TO RANGADASA AS WELL AS TO HIS DESCENDANTS.

THUS, THE HUMBLE DEVOTEE WAS REBORN AS THODAMAN, KING OF THODAMANDALAM, WHO COMMISSIONED THE GRAND TEMPLE FOR SHRINIVASA. IT STANDS EVEN TODAY, AS TIRUPATI, ON THE SEVENTH HILL OF TIRUMALA.

BEGINNING OF AN EPIC SAGA

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